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When Will Baby Sleep All Night?

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How to Help Baby Sleep

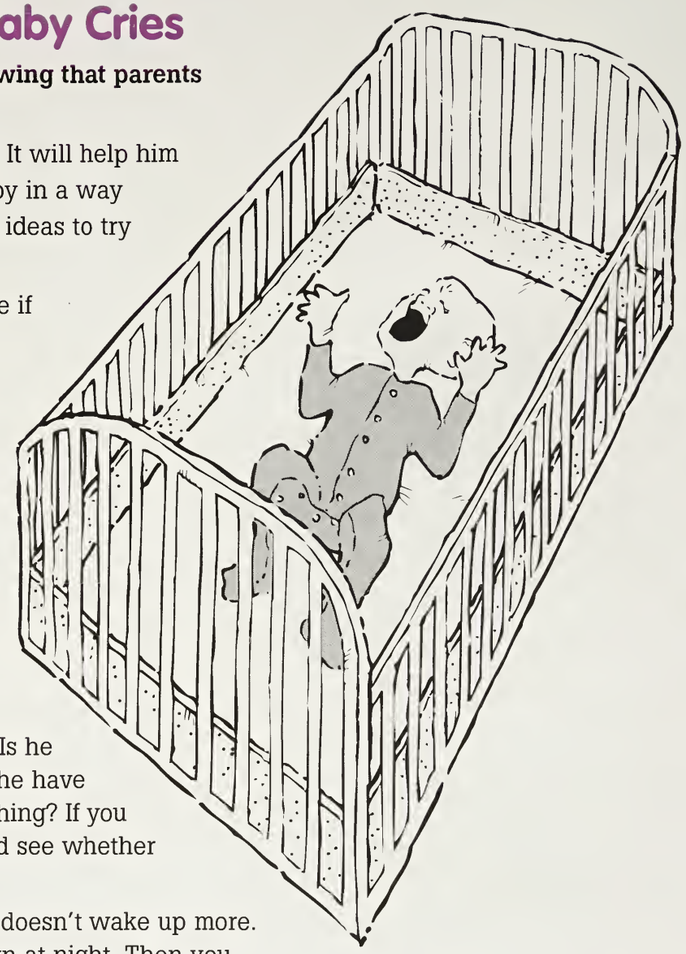
Here are some ideas for helping your baby learn to sleep at night. Remember, babies are all different. It will take some babies longer than others to sleep through the night.

- Do quiet activities at the end of the day instead of ones that get baby excited. To get her ready for sleep, develop a bedtime routine, and do it at the same time each night. Rock, cuddle, or read to help baby settle down.
- Help baby learn to comfort himself. This will help him get back to sleep on his own if he wakes up at night. Give him a pacifier, a soft toy, or a special blanket to hold, or let him suck his thumb. Also, it's important to put baby to bed while he's awake instead of letting him fall asleep while nursing or rocking. A baby who is always put to bed asleep is more likely to be a baby who wakes up during the night.
- Some babies wake up because they get hungry, especially babies less than 3 months old. If your baby usually falls asleep early, try waking her at 11:00 for a good feeding. This might help her sleep until early morning. Although many people think so, feeding cereal to babies does **not** help them sleep through the night.

What to Do When Baby Cries

Very young children need the comfort of knowing that parents will always help them, day or night.

Going to your baby when he cries is important. It will help him learn to trust you. The secret is to check on baby in a way that helps him go back to sleep. Here are some ideas to try with your baby:



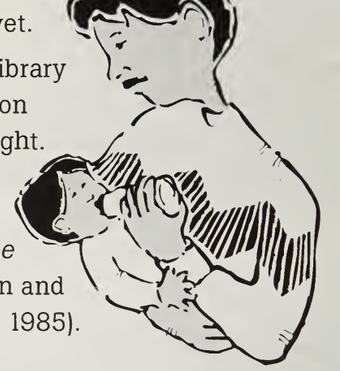
- Wait for a few minutes before going in to see if baby goes back to sleep. If you go in too soon, she can't learn to comfort herself and go back to sleep on her own. Some parents wake up the minute the baby starts moving around. If that happens to you, you can move the baby's crib or turn down the monitor so you don't wake up so easily. If baby really needs you and cries loudly, you will still hear her and wake up.
- If baby doesn't go back to sleep, check to see if there is any problem that you need to help with. Is baby being bothered by loud noise or bright light? Is he too hot or too cold? Is he hungry? Does he need a diaper change? Does he have a fever, an ear infection, or problems with teething? If you think one of these is a problem, take action and see whether baby goes back to sleep.
- Be gentle and quick in helping baby so she doesn't wake up more. Leave a night light on when you put baby down at night. Then you won't need to turn on a light when you go in later. Try patting baby gently on the back for one minute instead of picking her up. Don't rock or play with baby. This might encourage her to wake up more often at night because she likes rocking or playing with you
- If baby is well, dry, and not hungry, he may just need to cry a bit to fall asleep. But listening to a baby cry is hard work. A few minutes can seem like an hour! To help you wait, set a timer for 10 minutes. You might even want to wear ear plugs or close a door to help muffle the baby's crying. If baby is still crying after 10 minutes, go again to check whether something is wrong, then set the timer again.

Where You Can Get More Help

If you try these ideas but they don't seem to work, talk to your doctor.

There may be a medical reason why your baby wakes up. Talk openly with your doctor, and mention anything you are concerned about. Sometimes a doctor may give you medicine to help baby sleep so that you can get the sleep you need. But you should understand that baby may start waking again when you stop giving the medicine. If you and your doctor do decide to give baby medicine, be sure to follow the directions carefully. Talk with your doctor if you have any questions.

Talking with other parents about your problem can also help. They may have ideas that you haven't tried yet.



Also, check your local library or bookstore for books on babies waking up at night. Here's one you might ask for: *Helping Your Child Sleep Through the Night,* by J. Cuthbertson and S. Schevill (Doubleday, 1985).

MORE ▶▶▶

Parents of new babies often ask, "Will my baby ever sleep through the night?"

It is normal for babies to wake up during the night.

Some babies go back to sleep on their own, but others cry, and their parents wake up.

Most babies learn to sleep all night during the first year. They have to grow big enough to go longer and longer without being fed; a 6-month-old baby may sleep six hours at night before needing to eat. And many babies go back to sleep easily after their nighttime feedings.

Some babies take longer to learn to sleep through the night. Even at two years old, one child out of every five wakes up and cries most nights. The baby's personality may be a factor. Some babies are restless, and they wake easily. Others sleep soundly and for a long time. Others need less sleep, and they wake up very early in the morning.

Waking at night is not considered a problem for families in every part of the world. In some cultures parents don't expect babies to go to sleep alone, or at a certain time or place. But for many parents in our society, it is hard when babies wake up at night. Parents don't get enough sleep, and they aren't free to nap when baby does during the day.

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Don't Give Up

Most babies wake up at night for a while.

They are learning how to go to sleep on their own. But you need your rest, too.

If you find you are becoming very upset with baby for waking up at night, make sure she is safe in her bed. Then go into another room and calm down. Talk to someone. Ask a friend or family member to help for a while so you can get some sleep.

Remember that your baby isn't waking up on purpose to upset you. Your family must decide what will work best for you so everyone gets the rest and privacy they need.

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